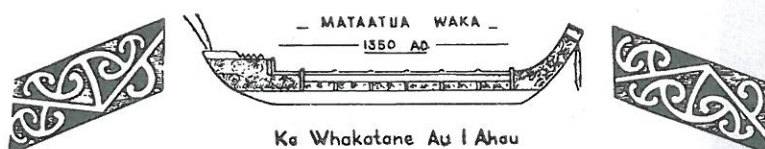


# HISTORICAL REVIEW

VOL. XXIII, No 1.



JOURNAL

*of the*

Whakatane and District  
Historical Society  
Inc.  
*New Zealand*



MAY, 1975

*Kereopa's Utu.*

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KEREOPA'S UTU.

(Historical Review XXII(2) - November, 1974)

The footnotes provided on pp.124-125 by way of explanation as to what occurred at Rangiaowhia on that fateful Sunday + in February 1864, based on Cowan's New Zealand Wars, have been queried by one Opotiki reader as not being sufficiently comprehensive. In fact, Cowan's statements are challenged on the ground that they only tell a portion of the story and, in reconstructing some of the incidents, he relied on the memories of his informants, a dangerous practice having regard to the fact that 60 years had elapsed since their first enactment.

The 'Rangiaowhia Affair', as it has been described by Gudgeon, has been recorded by several authors and in deference to my objectionist I set out some of these accounts. The first is by "One who was there", a veteran so impressed by the vigorous and life-like picture of the fight at Rangiaowhia displayed in the Auckland Public Library some years later that he felt impelled to set down in writing his memories of the engagement.

...It did not take long for the cavalry to clear the enemy out of Rangiaowhia, our infantry being far in the rear. Having accomplished our work, we had turned about and were taking prisoners as we came along, when Capt Wilson's attention was drawn to a whare, near which a struggle was going on between Cpl Little, of ours, and a huge Maori. Little having secured his man, Capt Wilson ordered Cpl McHale to make prisoners of the other Maoris inside the whare, who we could hear talking. McHale entered the hut, but no sooner had he passed the door than two shots were fired, apparently from the Corporal's revolver, when Capt Wilson called out, "What the --- are you shooting the Maoris for?" and jumping from his horse was into the hut in a moment. The door was so low he had to stoop to get inside. The place was full of smoke, and as Capt Wilson entered he found under him McHale's body, his feet towards the door, and face down. The captain could not see anyone else for the darkness and smoke, consequently he soon backed out, calling out that McHale had been shot, which the men no sooner heard than with their carbines they commenced to riddle the house, which was built of slabs. The firing soon brought together the whole of the cavalry, and after a while some of the 65th and Forest Rangers, also the general and staff, came up. It was after General Cameron's arrival that Colonel Nixon was shot from the door of the whare. Then, as the Maoris did not surrender when challenged for the second time, the infantry fired the house. I saw one Maori walk out of the blazing hut, his blanket singed on his back. Poor fellow! he fell within ten paces of the door whence he and his compatriots had so wantonly shot our colonel and many other good men. There was nothing now to prevent us from recovering McHale's body, but its condition was such that we could hardly distinguish it from the Maoris around him. We succeeded in identifying it, however, and bore it away.

The sun was overhead and baking hot as we moved slowly with

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+ Due to an unfortunate typographical error which was not noticed when proof-reading, the date is shown therein as 12 Feb instead of 21 Feb. 1864. H.D.L.,



our dead and wounded back to Te Awamutu. The wounded suffered much from fatigue and heat, and the enemy followed us up and fired at us along the way. I may mention that, in the pursuit before the whare was attacked, the Maoris, men and women, were jumbled together running away, and, being so much alike, the women were in danger of being killed. Capt Wilson, who had command of the advance guard, called to the women, telling them to sit down, "E kotou, e nga wahine e noho ki raro, kei mate kotou". They obeyed and we passed them; they then got up and ran on. I heard some days afterwards that the big Maori, whom I mentioned before as having been taken prisoner, had said that his life was saved by a man who wore a silver band round his cap, meaning Capt. Wilson. I write this simply to show that we did try to save the natives. It was a sad day, of course, for all concerned; but, as they have asserted that we kohuru (murdered) them, I have endeavoured to show how they brought about their own destruction and had no chance of escape.

At the great Maori meeting at Kopua, twelve months last May, Capt Wilson met two gentlemen - Wesleyan ministers - who informed him that there was but one thing the natives were sore about; namely, the kohuru at Rangiaohia. The captain replied, "I can explain all about that affair, for I was there. It was I who sent the man whom the Maoris shot into the hut to make prisoners. Our man was dead inside the hut before the attack commenced".

After the action at Hairini, Capt Wilson made a rough sketch of the ground where Colonel Nixon had fallen, showing the position of the huts there; and the picture of the fight at Rangiaohia is based upon this sketch. Our old colonel's revolver is now the property of Capt Wilson, while he slumbers in the cemetery at Auckland, awaiting the great reveille, when those who fell in that hut will bear witness to the truth of this statement. ( pp.176-77.)

Rusden, in History of New Zealand, Vol.2, is one who rushed into print on the subject rather boldly, as he says:

At daybreak the general pushed on from Te Awamutu to Rangiaohia. "The few natives who were found in the place were quickly dispersed, and the greater part escaped, but a few of them taking shelter in a whare made a desperate resistance until the Forest Rangers and a company of the 65th Regiment surrounded the whare, which was set on fire, and the defenders either killed or taken prisoner." This was the official method of telling, or concealing, that women or children were burned to death. For the credit of General Cameron it may be hoped that when he thus wrote, four days after the occurrence, he did not know the truth, which was subsequently notorious. Of what avail was it to preach peace to the Maoris, and tell them to be merciful when a British force, commanded by a general and accompanied by a bishop, burned women and children in a Maori house! Was it to be wondered at that a grief came upon the bishop when he heard afterwards that a plot was laid by the enemy to take his life? The successful general returned to Te Awamutu with 21 women and children, who were not burned....The Maoris had not dreamed that heavy guns and a large body of troops would be turned aside against women and children. Their rage at being outwitted by the flank movement which left them idle, and destroyed their food and plantations, was exaggerated by the burning of their wives and children.

Rusden may be excused his indignation at the events as he saw them, but it is to one, Potatau, later to become Maori king, that we should turn for a more reasonable account of the affair; after all, he was in the whare at the time:

...It took place on Sunday morning. Early in the morning I had reason to go outside the house. I then saw some troopers passing behind the house. I at once ran to my father's house. I had not been there long when my grandfather came to the same house. His name was Hoani [Poutama]. It was because he knew we were there that he came, so that he might die with us - Ihaia, Rawiri, and his son. At this time myself and my mother went outside the house, and sat at the door of the house. I heard my father say to my grandfather: "Let us lay down our guns and give ourselves up as prisoners." My grandfather said: "Am I greater than your uncles who were taken at Rangiriri?" My father again said to my grandfather: "Let us go in peace, and according to law". My grandfather would not agree. At this time the soldiers came to us, and asked my mother in Maori: "Are there any Maoris in the house?" She replied: "No, there are no Maoris in the house". My father at once said: "Yes, there are Maoris here". The European who spoke Maori came to the door of the house, and caught hold of my father, and handed him over to the soldiers. The European went inside the house. My grandfather shot him and killed him. Some of the others dragged the body in the house. At this time my mother and self arose and went through the soldiers and between the troopers. They did not interfere with us, but allowed us to pass. We went to the house of Thomas Power, who had a Maori woman to wife. After we left we heard the soldiers firing. Whilst we were at the house of Thomas Power, the Government interpreter came there. I may say that by this time a large number of women and children of our people had come to Thomas Power's house. What the interpreter said to us was that the general would have to deal with us. If he would allow us to take our departure it would be well; we could do so; if he sent us to Te Awamutu it would have to be so; but he told us to remain at this house. After this the interpreter left us. At this time the firing had ceased. We at once left the place and ran off to the bush, and made for Rangitoto.

W.J. Phillipps regarded the structure as a church-house, allocating No. 112 to it in his book, Carved Maori Houses. He says:

...Potatau's statement is of importance as indicating the particular house in which the victims perished. It was the house of his father, a leading high chief of Waikato, and as such was probably a whare rununga, even though it has been described as being only 5ft high; but this is in accordance with the old custom of building dwellings for winter warmth.

Whether the people were assembled in this building for morning service, as many of the Waikato still believe, or whether we assume that they flocked into their church as the largest and safest refuge we cannot say for certain. But in all accounts so far published there is nothing to indicate that this was the village church. It was not just a straw or raupo whare, but a whare with wooden slabs (poupou) on the sides as stated by Gudgeon, and, we assume, carved in part at least, as befitting such an

important building. The church was burnt in the heat of battle when feelings ran high because of the slain and the stubborn attitude of the defenders, who probably feared to surrender; but we must remember that it is unlikely that any of the British soldiers knew that this building was the English church of Rangiaowhia and that it was probably filled with converts to the new Christian faith.

Phillipps seems certain that no shots were fired in the village until Corporal McHale was shot by Poutama, the grandfather of Potatau, and says so in his book.

Potatau was a little boy at the time of the Rangiaowhia affair, and it appears that his statement was made some time afterwards. It was written down in his presence, and the translation, though rough, is accurate; it was made by one of the half-caste natives who lived with Potatau when he was residing at Korokonui and Gudgeon quotes it in his Defenders of New Zealand, pp.178-179.

Finally, I wish to quote from a statement attributed to the late Sir Apirana Ngata, who said -

The Maori had been used to the connection between the tohunga and the war party, and Bishop Selwyn's connection with the British forces here and elsewhere was one of the things that damned Christianity and its representatives among its Maori converts. It turned all Waikato against the missionaries down to this day. This burning had another consequence: It was one factor leading to what has become known as perhaps the outstanding example of Maori savagery during the Hauhau fighting, namely, the murder of the missionary, Volkner, by Kereopa. All that lay behind this is not known to the pakeha historian. Two of Kereopa's daughters were burnt to death at Rangiaowhia and he swore savage vengeance on all missionaries. He is reported as saying: "Friends, this a word from God to you. If any minister or other European comes to this place, do not protect him, he must die, die, die."

Reference to my footnotes in the earlier REVIEW (p.124) will reveal that I stated: "The church at Rangiaowhia was not burned as claimed." I was, of course, alluding to the wooden structure erected by the missionaries at Rangiaowhia last century that is still standing today, and which I thought was the subject of Mr Pera's narrative. That sentence, appearing right at the bottom of the page, requires, therefore, to be deleted.

Even Phillipps does not appear to be entirely convinced that the building involved in the incident was a church, but in the light of alternative evidence is accepting the claims of the Waikato people and labels it as such.

In conclusion, one wonders whether in view of Potatau's remarks the old warrior whose life St Hill of General Cameron's staff tried so valiantly to save was Poutama, Potatau's grandfather. It is an interesting conjecture.

- H.D.LONDON.

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## APPENDIX I.

(Lieut. General Cameron to Governor Grey.)

Head Quarters, Te Awamutu  
February 25, 1864.

Sir, -I have the honour to report, for your Excellency's information, that at 11 o'clock on the night of the 20th instant, I marched with the force named in the margin \* from Te Rore towards Te Awamutu, by a track that crosses the Mangapiko at Waiari.

* Distribution	Field Officers	Capts.	Subs.	Staff.	Sgts.	Rank & file
Royal Artillery Mtd Corps	..	..	1	1	3	36
Colonial Defence Force	1	2	3	2	3	36
Royal Engineers	1	1	2	..	..	22
14th Foot	..	..	..	..	..	5
18th "	..	2	..	..	..	5
40th "	..	..	..	..	..	4
65th "	1	4	9	3	24	415
70th "	1	4	10	3	20	360
Forest Rangers	..	2	2	..	4	95
Navy and Marines (10 Offrs)	..	..	..	..	..	145
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I left Colonel Waddy at Te Rore in command of the remainder of the troops, with orders to continue in the entrenched camp in front of Paterangi pa until the following night.

I arrived at Te Awamutu at daybreak on the 21st, and immediately pushed on to Rangiaohia, which I found nearly deserted. The few natives who were in the place were completely taken by surprise, and refusing to lay down their arms, fired on the Mounted Royal Artillery and Colonial Defence Force, whom I sent on in advance of the column. The natives were quickly dispersed, and the greater part escaped; but a few of them taking shelter in a whare, made a desperate resistance, until the Forest Rangers and a company of the 65th Regiment surrounded the whare, which was set on fire, and the defenders either killed or taken prisoners.

I regret to say that several casualties occurred on our side, and amongst them Colonel Nixon, commanding the Defence Force, who was severely wounded in endeavouring to enter the whare. Our loss was two killed and six wounded. About 12 natives were killed and 12 taken prisoners.

I have detained 21 women and children who were found in the village.

Immediately after the settlement was cleared I marched the troops back to Te Awamutu.

. . . . .

[Two days later, after the engagement at Hairini]

Leaving the 50th Regiment and two guns under Colonel Weare, near the Catholic Church at Rangiaohia, I withdrew the remainder of the troops to Te Awamutu, where Colonel Waddy arrived with his force at 11 o'clock that night, having before he left Te Rore, taken possession of the Paterangi pa, which, as well as the one at Piko-piko, was deserted by the enemy in the morning.

I cannot praise too highly the admirable conduct of all the troops, regular and colonial, during the fatiguing night march of the 20th, and the operations of the two following days, but particularly of the Mounted Royal Artillery under Lieutenant Rait, of the Colonial Defence Force under Lieutenant-Colonel Nixon, and afterwards under Captain Walmsley, and of the 50th Regiment, under Colonel Weare.

I deeply regret that the severe wound received by Lieut.Col. Nixon has deprived me, though I trust only for a short time, of his valuable services. [He succumbed to his wounds, Ed.,] The high state of discipline and efficiency of the Colonial Defence Force, and the eagerness which their invariably manifest to come in contact with the enemy, are chiefly due to the example and exertions of that able and zealous officer.

I beg to bring under your favourable notice the invaluable services rendered to the force under my command of Mr. Edwards of the Native Department, whose information regarding the roads and tracks of this part of the country I have always found most correct. Without his assistance to guide the column, the night march of the 20th could not have been undertaken.

I beg to enclose copy of a report received from Colonel Waddy, C.B., regarding the evacuation of the Paterangi Pa.

I have, &c.

D.A. CAMERON,  
Lieut.-General.

His Excellency  
Sir George Grey, K.C.B., &c.

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The original of the foregoing - shortened - despatch from General Cameron to Governor Sir George Grey is held by National Archives, Wellington.

It is printed in full in both the New Zealand Gazette of 3 March 1864 and the Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives, 1864 - E3, pp.29-30.

I am indebted to Mr T. Reynolds, Archivist, National Archives, for a photocopy of the latter, from which this Appendix has been reproduced.

H.D.L.,

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